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THE
P O W E R
OF
W A T E R - D O C K
AGAINST THE
S C U R V Y ;

*Presented by
Dr J. R. Chadwick*

1358

WITH

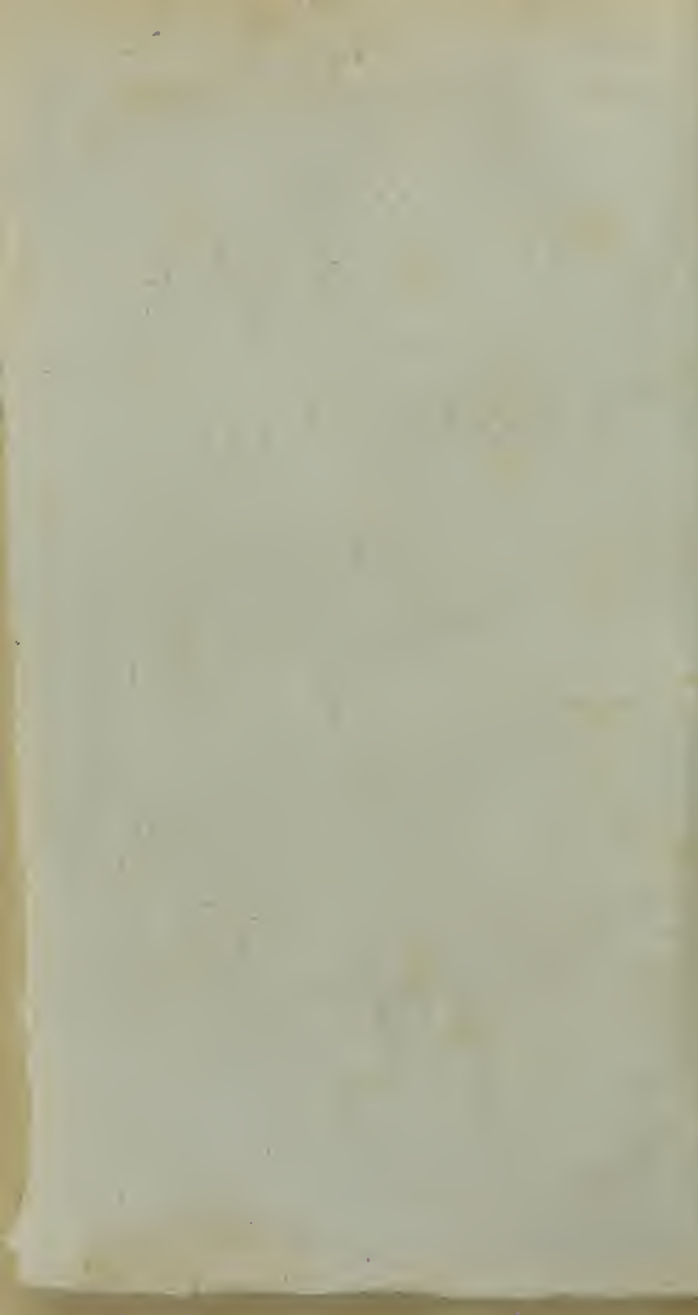
MARKS to know that Disease in all its States ; Instances of its being mistaken for other Disorders ; and RULES OF LIFE for those afflicted with it.

By the late Sir JOHN HILL, M. D.
Member of the Imperial Academy.

*If any one is ill, and knows not his disease, let him suspect
the Scurvy.* MATHIOLUS.

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THE POWER OF
WATER-DOCK
AGAINST THE
SCURVY.

SECTION. I.

THE disease we in England call the Scurvy, and to which we almost all are subject, is often misunderstood where it does not appear externally, and mismanaged where it does; many things being in common use, as remedies, which provoke and increase the disorder. To disclose it where it does not appear, and shew a remedy which will cure it in all cases, is the purpose of the present pamphlet.

Where the scurvy shews itself upon the skin, there can be no mistake; but where it is latent there may be a thousand: for there is scarce any disease it will not imitate. It is not a year since this medicine cured a married, honest, miserable gentleman of pains in his legs which he supposed venereal. More than himself had been deceived: he had estranged himself from his lady's bed, and been harrassed a long time with disgustful methods, when this simple remedy cured him, without return.

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The stomach is often weak ; and bitters are taken in vain : the spirits are low, and recourse is had to cordials, which inflame the disease ; the mind is disturbed, not enlivened, by them at the time, and that short unpleasant tumult is followed by the most sad dejection.

Can we wonder, when the disease is mistaken, the medicines do not relieve it ? The effect is very different in either case, when this simple remedy is taken : the stomach is at ease as soon as it is swallowed ; the spirits, though not elated, become at once composed ; and we enjoy that satisfaction which they only can value who have known the want of it—the supreme pleasure of tranquillity. We rejoice in the present cessation of the complaint ; and, from that first effect of the medicine, have a right to form the most agreeable presage of cure.

In cases where these and other complaints from a latent scurvy are extreme in degree, and of long continuance, sometimes a slight eruption appears upon taking the dock : but let not this alarm the patient ; he may securely rejoice in it. It declares, to a conviction, the true nature of the complaint ; it is always slight, and never continues more than a few days. The same medicine which drove the humour to the skin, expels it thence by the pores in a gentle perspiration : the eruption itself being in reality no more than a tumultuary and over hasty effort of nature

ture to throw it off that way, more being driven to the skin than can find its passage thence, till the farther effect of the medicine opens it a more free course.

Where the disorder shews itself on the skin, and the eruption is the whole disease, the difficulty is much less; the effects of the dock are obvious, and every day shews the advance made towards cure.

This is obtained perfectly in a longer or shorter time, as the disorder is of more or less strength and continuance. When a few heats appear upon the face, and there is no more complaint, these lose their redness and itching every day as the medicine is continued, and by degrees vanish entirely. Ten days or a fortnight usually complete this cure.

If there be more of the offending humour in the blood, these heats will be longer in disappearing; and in worse cases, without due care, they will be liable to return. The medicine is therefore to be continued longer: and if at any time after the cure the least heat is felt in the skin near the place where the eruptions were, recourse must be had to it again. But, even in the worst of these instances, it is no very long continuance of the dock that is required for the cure; and as to this recourse to it upon returns, a few days are always sufficient.

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There is also another great encouragement to so much perseverance as is wanted. In those considerable degrees of the disorder which require time in their cure, the external appearance is not the whole of the complaint; the removal of the before-named symptoms, pain, sickness and despondency, always in these cases keeps pace with the removal of the heats upon the skin, and does not let the patient tire upon the medicine.

In these more confirmed cases, the first effect of dock is, always throwing out more eruptions: but the patient may here also rest assured that these will be of no continuance. What nature fixes on the skin are, more or less, obstinate; but these, which are the plain effect of the medicine, like those which appear for the first time on taking it for an internal scurvy, never remain more than a few days, and often but a few hours.

The plain and certain way in which the medicine acts is this, always consistently, and always alike: Its first effort is by insensible perspiration; it opens the obstructed pores, gives passage to the offending humour which is there, and throws more thither of what was in the blood, to go off in the same way.

If there be more of it than can be so discharged, or perhaps what is there be in its nature too gross to pass that way, there is then, in a few hours, a more
than

than ordinary discharge of urine, and instantly on this the whole frame and constitution are relieved. The patient feels, by the new ease and unaccustomed cheerfulness he enjoys, that he has had more of the scurvy than was to be seen upon his skin; and sets a proper value upon the means of his relief.

These are the effects of water-dock; not slightly brought together, or hastily set down; but what have been collected from a great number of instances, all agreeing in the several particulars, and confirming one another.

I can therefore, without hesitation, boldly and certainly pronounce this medicine a remedy for the scurvy, in every state, condition and degree of that disease; and this with the most perfect innocence, for it cannot repel.

Whatever could drive in the scurvy would convert the mildest into the worst kind of that disease. There need no arguments to prove that a scorbutic eruption struck in would be at least as bad as the same disease naturally latent. This happens often from outward applications; of which let every one take care; and there are inward methods that may do it. I could name some miserable instances which have come within my notice afterwards: but, without terrifying those who may have thrown themselves into the way of such mischief, it is enough to say, that their condition

tion is the same with theirs who have a scorbutic humour in the blood which never has yet appeared ; and that this medicine is in either case equally a remedy.

The effects I have seen from water-dock support this assertion. The persons afflicted with this complaint, who have taken the essence under my immediate direction, in the space of the last seven or eight years, amount to a very great number ; and every one of them has received a perfect cure. The words are very absolute, and may seem strange to persons acquainted with the disease, and not with this remedy ; but they relate to plain facts which have come within my own knowledge ; and therefore I have a right to speak them with the greatest certainty and freedom : if it be otherwise, those concerned must know it ; and I hope, for the sake of the public, they will contradict me.

I can with equal truth declare, that I never saw or heard of the least hurt or inconvenience to any person, in any of these cases, from taking the essence of water-dock, though so many and so various. Such perfect safety joined with a less degree of power might entitle a medicine to great regard : and that perfect incapacity of doing hurt is so strictly and exactly true of this, that it has preserved the same character, though taken where the scurvy was complicated with many other diseases.

Indeed

Indeed, by all I have seen in a vast variety of instances, and all I have heard from many persons in different places who have taken this medicine for a long time, and in great quantities, it perfectly answers the old Greek character given of it when the powers of herbs were better known than now—"That few medicines are more effectual, none more innocent."

I claim no merit as a discoverer of its virtues; they were known in the earliest days of literature, and have been handed down to us, through a succession of ages, by the best writers. All the praise that can belong to me is, that, at a time when chymistry has overrun natural physic, I have restored its use.

SECTION II.

THERE are many kinds of dock, but one species alone possesses this great virtue : it is therefore fit it should be distinctly known ; and this is easy ; for it exceeds the rest in stature as much as virtue. It grows only in wet places ; not usually in water, but always near it. The leaves are half a yard long, and of a fine pleasant green ; the stalk is six feet high, robust, erect, and crimson ; on its top grow spikes of greenish flowers, and after these large seeds of a redish brown.

These are a few plain characters, but there need no more ; if the plant be examined by them, it cannot be mistaken.

The time of the great water-dock's flowering is in June, July and August : it is at that season the easiest known, but it has then little virtue : the root is the only part of use ; and this must be taken up at an earlier period.

The course of nature in the plant is this : the seeds which fall in autumn produce young shoots with a few small leaves only ; and those soon after wither : in spring more leaves rise from those young roots, and they stand the summer, and, if the weather be mild, the winter also. All this time the root is increasing in size and virtue. The stalk is not to rise till the
May

May following; and it is when nature is preparing for that great effort, but has not yet begun it, that the root has its full virtue.

Therefore in the middle of April the roots should be dug up, taking only those of a year and half's growth, and which have not yet flowered. They are at that time a foot long, and more than an inch in diameter; of a ruddy brown on the outside, and, when cut, of a deep orange colour. It is best to know the plant; but even if the roots be bought, they may be trusted when they have these characters.

Beware of what are sold by some in the markets: they are knobby and spongy; reddish, not yellow, within; and are the roots, not of the great water-dock, but of the common *sharp-pointed dock*; a plant excellent for ointments, but internally not to be spoken of, in comparison with the true great water-dock, for virtue. There is too much cause for guarding against these roots, for they come sometimes supported by what might be called authority. Some years since I gave a great quantity of water-dock-root to a country practitioner, and was told afterwards that what I sent was not the right, for that the root of water-dock was *bulbous*. I suppose the irregular, spongy masses of the sharp-pointed dock-root had passed for bulbs; and he who made the ignorant remark had seen no other.

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When the true kind is found, and the roots of a due age are taken up, in April, they are to be wiped with a clean coarse cloth, and split. The inner bark alone contains the virtue of the plant, as I have found by manifold experience. Therefore the hard, woody part in the middle of the root is to be taken out as useless; and the bark being again rubbed well with the cloth, the outer rind, which is thin and tender, will come off, and only the useful inner bark remain. This is to be dried in an airy room, where the sun does not shine, and afterwards powdered.

In this is the whole virtue of the plant: and it is a cure for the scurvy, even more certain than the bark is for an ague. The *essence* is made from this inner bark, by a method which I have never concealed from physicians, and which I should add here, but that it would be of no use, either to private families, or to the preparers of medicines; requiring a bark bed, such as we have in stoves, and other implements not used in the common operations; so that it is altogether impossible they should make it. In a few words, it is nothing more than this bark of the root, prepared before drying by a vaporous penetration, as ginseng in China, and salep in Turkey; and afterwards dissolved by that gentle but continued heat, in a spirit, of a middle degree of strength, between what is called rectified, and proof.

What

What I have endeavoured is, in a few plain words, supported by facts in the course of a number of years, and of all which I believe there are living witnesses, to shew that there is no degree or kind of that disease we call the scurvy, but may be cured with certainty by this simple medicine ; and that the use of it is free even from the possibility of harm. There requires no skill in physic to know that nothing can do hurt in the scurvy, unless it can repel ; and that is a quality not only not existing in the dock, but perfectly contradictory to its nature.

SECTION III.

NO particular regimen, or course of life, is required on account of this medicine, nor any preparation of the body for it : nay, these things are not only needless, but I have found them hurtful. Bleeding tends to draw in that humour which it is our business to keep out, so long as any of it remains in the constitution ; and purges have sometimes brought on disorders in the bowels which nothing could relieve. I am afraid many lives have been lost this way, when the true cause was never once suspected.

For these reasons I have always begun the cure with this medicine, without any thing of what is called

led

led preparation ; and, instead of directing a strict manner of life, I have, in all common cases, desired the patient to live in his usual way. Those are fallacious cures which depend upon a reduced diet ; and I have always found, that when the person so relieved returned to his former method of living, the disease returned also, and often with more violence.

There are, however, certain general rules, which people of scorbutic habits ought always to observe. These do not relate so much to diet, as to other particular circumstances and accidents of life ; and these I shall endeavour to lay down, for the service of the patient : not from what has been written by others ; for, what with the confusion of names, and misconstruction of symptoms, I think no disease has been treated so imperfectly ; but from the condition of those who have been under my care, and the particular things which I have found most to relieve or hurt them.

A good air is of great use in the cure of every disease, but of none more than this. People who live in low and marshy grounds always require more time in the cure of the same degree of scurvy, than such as breathe a drier and purer air.

Those who live in salt marshes are very subject to the disease, and yet more difficult of cure. It is not meant that people cannot be cured who are fixed by their

their way of life and circumstances in these places ; but they must expect their relief to be more tedious. Let those to whom it is indifferent where they live, if they have any cause to suspect the scurvy, remove from them.

Air that is fouled by the breath and perspiration of many persons kept close together, is yet much more hurtful. It is for this reason, I suppose, that few are cured of the scurvy in an hospital : indeed, if it were possible, more care ought to be taken of the air in these charities ; for, besides rendering this disease untractable, they often bring on hectic and consumptions, in those who else would not have fallen into them.

It is in these bad airs, and almost in these only, that I have found the extreme degrees of the scurvy. In the inhabitants of salt marshes, offensive breath and decaying teeth are common symptoms ; and in hospitals, the eruptions, which would naturally have been followed only by a dry scurf or scale, have fixed into moist and permanent sores.

Even in the worst cases of the marsh scurvy, I have seen this medicine cure ; and it is particular, that the God of nature, who does nothing in vain, has fixed the plant in those grounds most abundantly ; that the soil, together with the mischief, might bring forth the remedy.

A

A sedentary life is another great cause of mischief from the scurvy. Exercise not only carries off a great deal of this troublesome humour, so universal in our constitution, but drives out a great deal more; and where the taint is in the blood, the next good to discharging it is, keeping it upon the surface. It disgusts and teazes there, but it destroys within.

A red face, or crufted arms or legs, or fiery pimples on the back or breast, are the most usual troubles that attend the scurvy with a life of exercise; but these eruptions being out, the patient enjoys health and spirits; nay, the more out the more; and add to this, the cure is much the easier.

On the other hand, the same degree of the scorbutic mischief in the constitution of a lazy or over-attentive man, a voluptuary, or a scholar, who, doating on his closet or his easy chair, gives nature no assistance in discharging or but attempting to discharge it, preys inwardly, and brings on a long and miserable train of symptoms; often miscalled by the names of other diseases, but its legitimate offspring.

That the unhappy patient of this character may know his case, and avoid at least the misery of mistaken applications, I shall lay down a detail of them.

His nights are passed either with perplexing dreams, or tiresome watchfulness; in the morning he
feels

feels a dryness of the throat, difficulty of breathing, and a confused numbness in the head ; till a great deal of tea, or some other weak, warm liquor, dissolve the concretions of the night, and bring on a slight, uncertain, short relief.

Soon after this, as the weather, diet of the preceding day, or some other accidental cause, determines, comes one or other of the following symptoms, and sometimes several of them together :—A pain under the breast, a fullen head-ach, drowsiness, a swelled stomach, and now and then a dread of suffocation ; dejection of spirits, with a miserable want of strength and vigour ; palpitation of the heart, with flutterings, and tremblings of the limbs, not permanent, but returning on the most slight occasions.

These are a kind of transitory symptoms, which from time to time take the place of one another ; but there are some also which are continual. These are, weaknesses of the stomach, and a want of appetite, hiccups and sour belchings, wandering pains, and sometimes a peculiar cough, on which the common medicines take little effect.

At times a pricking pain is felt in many parts of the flesh, and an itching of the ears and gums, a heat and dryness in the hands and feet, and flushings in the face, with a kind of burning.

These

These last are efforts nature makes in certain favourable circumstances to throw out the humour, or at least to tell the patient the true nature of his illness: they should be attended to with care, and seized with eager earnestness, and the cure attempted immediately by medicine; for this will take tenfold effect when nature thus assists.

Let no one slight her notices; they are always true, and often critical. I have seen cures performed under such circumstances in so little time, and with so perfect a success, as has exceeded all expectation: and, on the contrary, it must not be concealed, that I have seen, upon the neglect of these friendly intimations, this latent scurvy change into some disease of a much more terrible nature. In young people, epileptic fits are sometimes the consequence; in those advanced in years, a settled comatose stupidity; and often inflammations of the viscera, which medicines try to assuage in vain. When the efforts of nature are seconded by this medicine the cure is always particularly easy; nay, the mischiefs brought on by neglect are also remedied by it.

One very particular case of this kind came some time ago within my knowledge. A person of the middle time of life, a gentleman and a scholar, accustomed to the common symptoms of a latent scurvy; felt all at once, one morning as he was writing, a
flushing

flushing in his face, a tingling in his back, his arms and legs, and burning heat in his feet, inſomuch that he could not ſit; but, riſing in great uneaſineſs, rambled an hour or more about the apartment. In this time all the ſymptoms went off, except the burning in the feet, which laſted till the evening. The event was very ſingular. He then felt himſelf unuſually hungry, and complained of a gnawing at his ſtomach, which was too impatient for the ſupper of the family, and forced him to call for any thing that was in readineſs. He eat vaſtly more than he had ever done at once; nay, as himſelf ſays, more than he ever eat at three times in his life; and yet in the courſe of the night he grew hungry again.

From this time a ravenous appetite poſſeſſed him for ſeveral years: he, who had uſed to eat leſs than moſt people, devoured as much as three or four, and even this without ſatiety. The name of a canine appetite is better known than the cure: his country apothecary, a very able man, gave every thing that is uſual, without effect; at length, to blunt, if it were poſſible, the keenneſs of this everlaſting craving, he took every day, half an hour before dinner and ſupper, a draught compoſed of two ounces and a half of oil of almonds, with ſome marſhmallow ſyrup. This cured him of the gravel, to which he had been long ſubject; but as to the complaint for which he
took

took it, that remained as it was. This particular medicine, for so uncommon a disease, I have mentioned the more expressly, because, though not successful in the present case, the apothecary had seen it in another perform a cure, under the hands of a physician of great character.*

On his applying to me, I advised the water-dock; the original of the complaint appearing plainly to be a scorbutic humour, which nature not being able to throw out, had fixed upon the stomach.

As the long burning of the feet shewed the great effort for perspiration to have been made there, I directed him to wear woollen under stockings, and to line his shoes with flannel. The event justified my opinion: a slight redness appeared upon his cheeks soon after taking the dock, and the voraciousness of appetite ceased. The redness of the cheeks lasted about a fortnight; and he is now well: the medicine in this case having taken away the excess of hunger, though in all other cases I have seen it has increased the appetite.

There is another thing which it grieves me to accuse, and yet it must be named, nay, and strict caution must be given against it, as injurious in the scurvy: this is study. The pleasure of reading is not the thing meant here, but that fixed attention of mind

* *Dr. Alexander Stuart, physician to the late queen.*

mind which accompanies the researches into science. The mathematics are of the number of these studies, and that extent of mind by which men have sometimes endeavoured to comprehend within one view the whole of visible created beings, and, by arranging them in their true place, to understand, as it were, the purposes of God.

These are studies under which the mind, fixed to one point, conversing in itself, and busied with its own ideas, forgets the body; and in these cases the body always languishes, and often in the end perishes entirely. These men seem to act every day the last scene of Archimides, and bid death stay, as he bade the soldier, till they have finished the demonstration.

Persons of this kind deserve our admonitions most of all men, and they want them most; nor do they ever need them more than when they have a scorbutic taint in the blood; for under this course of life it is always latent. I have been willing to think that it was not the effect of study, but the want of exercise attendant on this kind of life, that gave so much occasion to disorders; but instances have come before me proving it otherwise; and I think one of the most obstinate cases that ever I have known was of a geometrician, whom I directed to use exercise as much as could be needful, but in vain.

I dare not rank myself among such men as these; but since no experience is so certain as that one feels
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within one's own body, I shall venture to add, in confirmation of this, that, notwithstanding all the exercise I have been able to take, and of every other good regulation that I know, some time since, while I was intent upon arranging plants in the method of nature, a scorbutic humour, which had never before been very troublesome to me, grew to such a height that it required a five weeks' course of dock, and I took it in large doses too, by which means I got the better of it.

Upon these considerations, and the foundation of so much experience, which I am very sure has been carefully attended, I may propose some general rules of life which will be serviceable to all scorbutic patients, whether they undertake their cure by this remedy or by any other, or whether they leave themselves, 'as many do, to nature, and a vain hope from time. This hope deceives them always; for howsoever the disease may more or less appear, yet, wherever it is in the constitution, it will, while neglected, be gathering strength; and, what is worse, the older we grow always the more tedious will be the cure.

The first thing then to be sought by the scorbutic patient is a good air; and of all good qualities the greatest in this case is, that it be dry. The side of a hill, upon a gravelly soil, with a west aspect, is the most desirable; the top of a hill, or an exposure
without

without shelter to the north, I have always found tend to fix eruptions upon the face, or other uncovered parts of the body.

Exercise proportioned to the strength, and at the best hours of the day, will prove highly serviceable ; and most of all so in a course of the effence of water-dock : walking or riding out always after taking the dose ; which therefore should be taken in these cases at hours most proper for exercise. This increases that perspiration which the dock naturally brings on, and, with care not to get cold after it, will make one dose as effectual as two or three.

The amusement of reading will be as useful as too much fixed attention would be bad ; always being upon the guard that this does not intrench upon the hours of exercise.

Meats easiest of digestion are best : the less of salted things are eat, at any time, the better ; but during the use of any medicine for the cure of this complaint such things should be more particularly avoided.

Pepper is best let alone, and spirituous liquors, which inflame the disorder always, and in many instances fix it in the face in the most troublesome manner. As to wine and malt liquors, no cure of the scurvy, as has before been said, will ever be lasting
which

which depends upon the abstaining from these ; for upon the return to them the disease itself will follow.

This is the general state of scorbutic disorders, and their cure ; but in this disease, as in all others, there will be here and there a singular instance, where, either from the natural confirmation of the skin, peculiar in some particular subjects, or from an hereditary, or perhaps a mixt, taint in the blood, a more than ordinary obstinacy is found in the complaint ; but even in these, of so many of them as have come before me, I have never found the addition of any other medicine necessary. A warm bath has sometimes opened the way to a cure ; and if the fair beginning made by that has seemed to fail afterwards, I have known a flannel waistcoat next the skin answer the purpose.

Once, and only once, I have seen a case where nothing but abstaining from meat and fermented liquors would give the medicines their due efficacy ; and when the cure was thus obtained, I was in constant apprehension of a return, upon the usual course of life being resumed. But this was done very gradually, the dock being at times continued, and the patient, though near three years are now passed since, continues well.

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